

All feelings live

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An interview by Diemuth Schmidt with the Munich actress Silvia de Leonardis on roles with wit, emotion on the set and the training of young

The successful German crime series make a living from their occupations, even in the smaller roles. In "Die Rosenheim-Cops" (ZDF), Silvia de Leonardis caught the attention recently as Mrs. Edeltraud Gerber. The classically trained stage actress (Munich, Konstanz, Zurich) can perfectly put her talent to the comic. In addition to her work in the theatre and in film and television, Silvia de Leonardis made her name as an acting coach with Bobby Brederlow and Janin Reinhardt. She is currently drawing up her own roles with Alex Cole Taylor from Los Angeles, with whom she is also giving acting workshops in Munich since 2015. In this interview she talks about, among other things, what is important in actors.

In "Die Rosenheim-Cops" you embody a feisty bitch. What do you enjoy about it?

Silvia de Leonardis: I have to smile even at the beginning of our interview. I would say: Seeing how much it annoys my partner about my weaknesses or how really angry or annoyed he gets with me. That always gives me a special treat. The more he gets angry, the more I drive it to the edge or the less he takes me seriously, the more I go to the anger and the resolute. And after such a take there's always plenty to laugh at and I love laughing. Resolute bitches have almost always a common denominator: They take everything personally and therefore want often to create as much trouble as possible to the opposite. I love human weaknesses and the elaboration of this gives me irrepressible fun.

Is it possible to learn to make people laugh, to become a comedian?

I would say to a certain degree, of course. The ability to listen is a basic requirement and timing is something learnable, if one is not entirely unmusical. But a sure instinct is worth gold. This allows you not to exaggerate, but to capture every moment, to savor it as long as possible and to respond with the right feeling and the right answer. As a comedian you respond in my opinion, more with your weaknesses than one that is acting. Whether on an object, a situation or to the partner. The more seriously you can work yourself up into the existing problem, the more fun it is to watch in my opinion.

Where you feel more comfortable - Comedy or Tragedy?

I like both very much. This is perhaps getting a bit from me, depending on what is the present topic in my life. Currently I am doing very well in my professional as well as my private life and of course the tragedy excites me more. Since my actress's soul hungers then afterwards, to go down into the deepest areas of pain and to feel all the great feelings of despair, distress, anxiety, shame, disgrace, self-blame, depression, feelings of humiliation. Is life a bit dreary, of course I would welcome a nice comedy - and so therefore also the comedy would welcome me.

Does one often try in comedy to conceal their weaknesses?

Yes, but I do not think only that. Sometimes it is wonderfully refreshing, easy to stand by your weaknesses. For example, I am thinking of my last role in "München 7". I took over the role of the nail designer Mrs. Kowalski. For me she was not very bright or sensational, but good-natured. She was also caught by the wardrobe dresser in an too tight outfit and already "I" was finished. I turned off my head and these characteristics lived particularly strong while other attributes of my person were put to the back. The director Franz Xaver Bogner liked it and he said goodbye after the end of shooting with the words "It was my pleasure."

How was the collaboration with colleagues in "Die Rosenheim-Cops"?

Funny and warm. I still maintain contact with the wonderful and charming Marisa Burger aka Mrs Stockl and Joseph Hanneschläger who is the lifeblood of the series. And working with director Jörg Schneider, with whom I was shooting twice in SOKO 5113 is anyway, always a dream.

How do you prepare for a role beforehand?

Oh I have to say I am incredibly ambitious and hardworking. I work, if I have enough time, for hours and hours of it. First, I read the script through completely and what is given as information and ideas on the character. Then I put it aside and try to feel the first images of the character come into my head. Questions arise as "what brings her to here", "why can't she act different here", etc. After this I learn, with the Meisner technique, the text by heart and repeat it when speak it perfectly at least 100 times. Then I start to work on the character and then I go to the set. That sounds crazy to many or very extravagant - it is, but this work is standard in Los Angeles. Then I go well prepared to the set so that the director can let me play everything backwards and offer my version of the character.

What appeals to you about acting?

It gives me the platform to experience and express emotions that do not find space in normal life. There is nothing you can get from acting. But if one is full of love, pain, joy or whatever it is and when it is impossible to express all this in normal life, then you can enter acting and help others, with what one has experienced and gone through. This is the art of acting that has a value and that I love.

Language is one of the important means of expression in your profession. What does it mean for you to shoot in English?

Oh, that's crazy. I am now better as an actress in English than in German. Is not that terrible? But that is because I almost always work and think in English. Through intensive collaboration with Alex Taylor I speak everything that concerns acting for three years almost exclusively in English. All shoots I translate only into English and work it with him. Only then it goes back into German. I even dream in English already. It is high time that Alex learns more German.

You are also active in the field of training actors. Can anyone learn acting?

Yes, I am convinced, anyone can learn to some degree with the Meisner technique, except perhaps lazy people. How good each one is, of course, is different and sometimes unpredictable. But what is "good" or "bad" is indeed often not to say, because opinions are all very well divided. I experience anew in working with Alex Taylor every day, how to develop a novice under his hands, as if by magic, as actors. Just when I was with him at his school in Los Angeles in February for several weeks, has impressed me enormously. And so the idea arose that I give four weeks in July, 2016 as his assistant for his annually Meisner Intensive Workshop, which takes place this time in Lecce, Italy. Together we want to give the opportunity for actors and actresses, here in Munich and the surroundings, to learn this fantastic technique. We intend that Alex from 2017 will regularly come to Munich to give workshops and I, in the meantime teach the actors and actresses the basics.

What advice would you give young people who aspire to be professional actors today?

I would advise everyone to do what their heart tells them. Whether it is heavy or light. So I would say: Do as your heart must, because then you will find a way.

Silvia de Leonardis passed classical acting school in Munich, Constance and Zurich. Among others, she played at the municipal theatre in Constance and in the Theater an der Grenze in Kreuzlingen/Swiss. During her theatre time she participated in a workshop for film acting (camera acting workshop) of the film and stunt production company Action Concept, in which she was able to get a small part in the TV series Der Clown. From then on, appearances in several episodes of Tatort followed, as well as a small part in Die Manns and Küstenwache, until she was discovered for comical roles. She especially succeeded in the presentation of resolute drama queens, and therefore got parts in the motion picture Großglocknerliebe, as well as in the comedy Die Rosenheim-Cops. From 1999 until 2006 de Leonardis also worked as a film coach on Set with the actor Bobby Brederlow, who was born with Down's syndrome, along with other actors. Both of them were a successful team for five years in many productions. In 2005 she worked for the telenovela Lotta in Love as a film coach for Janin Reinhardt. Since 1999 de Leonardis also works as a private acting coach and teaches in her own small private acting classes. de Leonardis started to work with Alex Cole Taylor, who in 2015 was certified for the 5th time as best acting school and acting teacher of Los Angeles and who is the successor of the Sanford Meisner school. Since 2015, they frequently offer acting workshops in Munich. De Leonardis lives in Munich, is married and has a daughter.

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